

Acceptance and the Pitfall of Passivity



*“God, grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.”*

— The Serenity Prayer, Reinhold Niebuhr

Acceptance is a powerful spiritual tool that when used with discernment is meant to result in a more highly evolved and harmonious relationship with reality. To use it effectively, we must differentiate between acceptance of what we cannot change and of what we can change but choose not to.

The fact is that we have relatively little control over manifested reality as a whole. As such, in most cases, acceptance is no more than common sense. However, using our free will and creativity, we can influence and make changes concerning a number of things in our outer and inner reality, including what happens around us and some aspects of our personal life. But most especially, we



can have influence in the internal realm. Because more evolved humans have a degree of free will, they are able to choose non-acceptance. Non-acceptance does not mean that we disagree with the way things are in general, but rather that we see reality in a dynamic way, as something that can be enhanced, enriched, and shaped in new ways.

The choice between acceptance and non-acceptance is not really available for the majority of humanity, because the level of free will we have is a reflection of how conscious we are. Most people, like other creatures on this planet, live out their lives struggling and coping with reality, without really considering their options or potential. They do not even accept their lives, living much like machines, as real acceptance cannot really exist without its opposite. A machine only functions (until it is broken); it does not think, make choices, or question its existence.

Since ancient times, more conscious humans have been questioning their reality. We have developed philosophy as an attempt to understand our place in life and find an optimal way of coping with the various challenges and contradictions of this physical realm. For instance, when we look at the various philosophical schools of ancient Greece, we can see how the ingenious thinkers of that time were trying to identify and describe the ideal human relationship with reality. There was the school of Hedonism, which believed that we should live for pleasure and enjoyment. Then there was the school of Stoicism, founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium, which upheld that the highest virtue was to acquire the knowledge that allows us to live according to the principle of divine reason. According to the Stoics, we can only control what is in our minds, and have no control over what is in nature. Consequently, they advised disregarding suffering and remaining equally indifferent to wealth, poverty, fame, and disrepute. In that way, Stoicism followed the idea of acceptance, but at the same time advocated a mental discipline of detachment, without which acceptance cannot work. Unlike animals, humans require more than just basic living and survival – they yearn for and seek meaning and purpose in life.

Only more conscious humans are able to formulate a philosophy surrounding their lives. This is the beginning of being in touch with free will. When people suffer, questioning the way things are and becoming stressed from trying to cope with life's challenges, negative mental states usually follow – the death of personal inspiration and dreams, hopelessness, depression, and despair. Various spiritual and therapeutic approaches recommend dealing with these negative mental states through acceptance. According to these models (and similar to the Stoics), acceptance is to have an



internal agreement with the will of life to embrace our human existence as part of a larger wisdom and destiny.

Of course, when seen from another perspective, the very idea of acceptance is somewhat absurd. After all, nobody is asking us whether we accept life, and it follows its course irrespective of whether we accept it or not. However, human beings have the unique ability to rebel against life and even negate the very will to live. A human being can take his own life, which is an extraordinary act of rebellion against the will of life. In more evolved animals, there are also rare cases of suicide, like the inexplicable beaching of whales, which seems to be voluntary. But the will to live is not the type of will that is usually connected to conscious choice. It is, rather, inherent in the matrix of life, and we will keep extending our existence at any cost – even a bacterium is bound by this primal will-to-live. And yet, taking one's life is possible, as a dramatic rebellion against this fundamental will to live. Because there is such a conflict here between the inherent will to live and the desperate act of an individual will to go against life, suicide is indeed the most traumatic event in anyone's existence.

Suicide is the most tangible expression of non-acceptance possible. At times, taking one's life in an extreme situation might be considered a reasonable option, such as in cases of terminal illness or chronic physical pain. However, if we take our life because we refuse to cope with the challenge of existence, we are violating the will of life, and in that way, we are going against our very purpose. This perspective should not be confused with the narrow-minded idea that suicide is sinful. Those who created this notion could not have had compassion for people who end their lives in agony. Religious doctrine has been deeply infused with superstition and thoughtless morality, and was created by individuals who had no connection to conscious spirituality. Through what is nothing short of spiritual criminality, such religious zealots have caused untold suffering and needless guilt.

Misapplication of Acceptance

The concept of acceptance is valid as an expression of the correct relationship between an individual's conscious will and the will of life. But it must also be seen from a higher perspective, and balanced with an approach that includes our willful cooperation with existence and its enrichment through our individual creativity.



In spirituality, as with many other concepts, the concept of acceptance has been misunderstood and misused by new age and pseudo-spiritual teachers and practitioners to induce what is no more than a hypnotic state of false relaxation. In neo-Advaita, for instance, the concept of acceptance is used as a means of avoiding practice through the notions that everything is already okay, that we can just relax, just be, that we are already enlightened, and so forth. Such ideas limit spiritual truth to a very shallow experience of the now. The fact is that even if an unawakened person does manage to live in accordance with the principle of acceptance, he or she will continue to suffer. If people honestly question their basic assumptions and seek holistic evolution and true freedom, they will not let themselves be indoctrinated by the superficial views of such non-dual teachings. Such simplistic interpretations of the place of acceptance in our path are just barriers that jeopardize our potential to realize our evolutionary purpose. When someone lives in forgetfulness, disconnected from their true and pure nature, why should he or she accept anything that blocks the possibility of real spiritual progress? That is not a time for acceptance, but for rebellion, for breaking through the shackles of lower consciousness.

True Non-acceptance or a Higher Rebellion

People are creatures of habit, repeating their errors over and over again. This is partly due to lack of imagination, and partly because of fear of change. This resistance to change is also unconsciously rationalized by the concept of acceptance. Many do the same work for much of their lives, live in the same country, stay in the same relationship – and all the while using a misguided understanding of acceptance to justify their life ‘choices’. Such pseudo-acceptance eventually results in the inertia of laziness and a life without meaning. And it is this kind of acceptance that neo-Advaita movements have borrowed from the collective unconscious and used as a hypnotic device in the field of spirituality. But it is one of the great nemeses of the soul, because it is anti-future; it traps us in the past.

There comes a point in our existence where we have to go against our ingrained habitual tendencies and the inertia of the false acceptance that sustains them. This is when we rebel and open our spiritual creativity, seeking the hitherto uncharted territories of our existence. In doing this, we begin to realize that our accepted way of life, including the very state of our consciousness, has been a barrier to our evolution rather than a means for progressing. This is the point at which we move from false acceptance to non-acceptance, and activate the courage that allows us to move beyond our basic insecurity. Without this courage, we have no chance of transcending false acceptance.



Entering the path does not mean falling into another false concept of acceptance. It is about breaking through the walls of our past self. Neo-Advaita and other teachings that tell us that everything is already okay are enemies of our purpose, pulling us back into false acceptance. The danger of such teachings has to be absolutely recognized and discarded as false. There is nothing to accept (or worth accepting) in the fragmented state of consciousness of an ordinary person – one has to rebel totally against its unconscious nature. The false acceptance of our present blocks the very possibility of our evolutionary progress. To enter the path is to open to the energy of the future, the journey linking our present with our spiritual potential.

Passive and Dynamic Acceptance

While entering the path demands opening to the energy of non-acceptance, this should not be confused with self-denial or negation of the present. Our present is our working base, the foundation from which we evolve into our potential. To negate ourselves would be to cut the very branch on which we sit. We must begin with the acceptance of who we are and our life as it is in all of its manifestations, or there cannot be self-respect and self-love. Self-love is the prerequisite for our sanity and spiritual integrity.

The life-affirming acceptance that embraces the limitations of our present reality while also forcing us to move beyond them into our future is what we can call 'dynamic acceptance'. 'Passive acceptance', on the other hand, is the kind that locks us into our past, pulling us back from our destiny with its burden of existential apathy and inertia, much like having an iron ball chained to our ankle. Alive and dynamic acceptance creates the healthiest relationship with the present, accepting its limitations, but seeing those limitations also as stepping-stones on the path to transcendence.

For instance, when one begins the basic work with consciousness in meditation, one has to accept the many challenges it involves, including the frustration of not being able to accelerate one's progress. But, at the same time, one does not accept being stuck in those problems forever, because one knows they must be transcended.

This can be tricky terrain on the path, as it is important that non-acceptance be free of emotional negativity, such as self-blame. On the other hand, a healthy amount of self-criticism is positive;



when we are lazy and keep being distracted by our subconscious tendencies, it is important to be self-critical. But this should not be magnified out of proportion by emotional self-punishment. Seekers often lose precious time and energy through self-judgment, feeling that they are not good enough or have made mistakes. But this is itself foolish. In healthy self-criticism, the principles of gentle self-acceptance, self-respect, and self-love must also be exercised.

Acceptance and Non-doing on the Path

Non-doing is a beautiful concept found in both Zen and Taoism, which means to submit oneself to states of non-activity or 'just being'. In pure non-doing, one is beyond practice. However, in, for instance, the Zen concept of 'shikantaza', the element of practice is included as a process of constantly returning to and submitting oneself to non-doing. Ideally, acceptance is naturally present in non-doing, but it is important not to fall into the trap of passive acceptance. In true non-doing, one is also in touch with one's evolution and spiritual unfoldment, and in possession of a clear vision of the path as a whole. In this way, the concept of non-doing is integrated into the principle of dynamic acceptance.

It is important to understand that real evolution will not come from non-doing on its own; it is just one of several pillars of practice. Walking the path requires us to be pro-active, using our will and focused surrender, in order to create the ground for further expansion. A seeker on the path must intuitively recognize when it is best to emphasize non-doing versus when active cooperation is required; he must, in other words, know how to balance and alternate between doing and non-doing. When losing continuity of recognition, one must concentrate, or when one is stagnating in a passive state of abidance, one must activate vertical surrender.

The line between doing and non-doing, between acceptance and non-acceptance, is not always sharply defined, and one's practice is often happening in that fine zone that lies between the two. For instance, when we cultivate the art of vertical letting go, this letting go is a meeting between pure non-doing and pure doing. Letting go contains a conscious intention and will to surrender through which we dissolve the energetic and existential knot of separation.



Acceptance and Allowing in Meditation

One of the most important energies that we use on the path is allowing. Allowing is not the same as non-doing. Rather, it constitutes a relationship of non-interference with the flow of meditation and with evolution in general. It should not be confused with passive acceptance, for it includes the elements of gentle cooperation, patience, and a loving connection to the now.

Our evolution cannot be forced. Even if we have done all that we can, the next step still cannot be attained by sheer willpower or even by surrendering, because we must wait for sufficient energetic transformation for the inner shift to take place. Sometimes, when we push too much in our practice, we put excessive stress on our energetic constitution, which then contracts and blocks our further progress. At such times, one simply has to be patient. Such waiting invites an element of a gentle flow from the now into the future. We wait not because we do not accept the now, but because we accept it in the context of our intuitive knowledge of the emerging future. We exist in time, and allowing reflects the unity of acceptance and our evolutionary flow in that time, or what we can call 'higher acceptance'. Allowing primarily relates to surrender, and for it to be genuine, we must have access to I am and be in a conscious relationship with universal subjectivity. Allowing without having awakened cannot be linked to higher acceptance and reflects a type of existential passivity.

Acceptance beyond Acceptance

To reach true acceptance, we must be one with reality. As long as we are separated, we look at life and at ourselves from an external position, and we try to choose the approach and stance we think might be best. However, this means that we are still struggling to accept reality as something happening to us, and this kind of acceptance can never be successful. Higher acceptance is the meeting between mind and no-mind, presence and absence. It is like the final act of verifying the truth of our spiritual completion, after which we live beyond the requirement to verify any further.

The only way to become one with reality is to merge with it through samadhi. Before we can experience true unity with the world outside, we must first reach unity with the inner realm; we must disappear into universal subjectivity. Here, we no longer need to mentally define our relationship with reality; we don't need to accept it or not accept it. We are beyond acceptance and non-acceptance; the acceptor and non-acceptor are no more. To live beyond acceptance is to live in freedom, where our individual will has merged into the transcendental will of life itself.



Blessings,

Anadi

For a full glossary of terminology please visit our website www.anaditeaching.com/glossary